Osprey Now In Production: V-22 Team Brings International Message to Le Bourget 1997

The first production V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft is under construction at Bell and Boeing facilities in Texas and Pennsylvania, following the release of funds by the U.S. Navy in April to pay for low rate initial production (LRIP) Lot 1 comprising five MV-22Bs for the U.S. Marine Corps.

With this approval, the V-22 is moving closer to introduction to the military in the United States - and eventually, internationally.

The first lot is part of a $1.454 billion contract awarded last June for the first three LRIP lots. At that time, $44 million was released for long-lead component procurement for the first lot of five aircraft. The current production schedule calls for five V-22s to be produced in 1998, seven in 1999 and eight in 2000.

John Buyers, Bell Boeing V-22 program director, said, "We are making great progress with the Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD) phase and the production program is accelerating rapidly."

Bell Boeing workers quickly loaded a variety of manufacturing and assembly tools with parts for V-22 Number P1, including the left and right avionics bays, composite fuselage side skins and cockpit floor and instrument panel. Wing skins also are being manufactured with the first already delivered to the final assembly facility.

Work on rotor components, including grips and yokes, is under way. Castings for gear casings purchased last year were received and numerous composite detail parts are being fabricated. Lot 1 aircraft will be delivered in 1999.

Marking another program milestone, the first Osprey built to production standards (aircraft number 7) was delivered on March 15 to the V-22 Integrated Test Team at the Patuxent River Naval Air Warfare Test Center in Maryland, following a flight from Bell Helicopter Textron Plant 6 in Arlington, Texas.

The 4.3-hour ferry flight covered 1,075 nautical miles and included a stop in West Memphis, Ark., and another in East London, Ky. Marine Corps test pilot Maj. Bill Wainwright and Bell Boeing V-22 chief test pilot Tom MacDonald left Bell at 08:05 a.m. CST and arrived at Patuxent River at 4:10 p.m. EST.

"Flight test productivity with aircraft number 7 has been outstanding, about 50 percent above predictions," Buyers said. "We believe numbers 8,9 and 10 will match this performance," he added.

Number 7 and three other V-22s will be used for final testing and operational evaluations by military crews from May 1999 through February 2000. Successful completion of the operational tests will pave the way for a full rate production (Milestone III) decision in 2000 and initial operating capability for the Marine Corps in 2001. In the absence of a civil certification process for military aircraft, these three events are significant as they signal the readiness of the Osprey for international sales.

Military services from around the world have expressed interest in the Osprey program. Bell Boeing and the U.S. Navy have held a number of information exchanges with procurement and operational leaders from several countries. Given the long lead times usually required for programming military procurement, potential buyers are starting to plan now for purchases in the 2001-02 time frame. Deliveries could be expected as soon as two years later.

Late last year, the Tiltrotor Team also was awarded a contract modification by the U.S. Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) for the EMD program of the Special Operations Forces variant of the Osprey, the CV-22. The contract calls for the design, integration, installation and test of a number of special operations-unique systems into the base line V-22, including terrain following/terrain avoidance radar, an electronic warfare suite, additional communications and navigation equipment, and additional fuel tanks in the Osprey's wings. Production CV-22s will be delivered to the Special Operations Forces in 2003.

The Bell Boeing Tiltrotor Team comprises Bell Helicopter Textron of Fort Worth, Texas, a wholly owned subsidiary of Textron, Inc., and Boeing Defense & Space Group, Helicopters Division, a unit of The Boeing Company.

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